

HORSEFLESH

by
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Abstract

A collection of poems submitted in conformity with the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts degree.

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The Circus

Costumed in feathers and bells,
six silver horses glide
into the central ring.
The spotlights to either side

reveal a troupe of clowns
juggling pins and hats
on unicycles and stilts,
while eight enormous cats

roar in unison.
An elephant appears,
a sequined maharani
balanced between his ears,

and now a strongman hefts
the tiny car packed tight
with pantomiming clowns.
High overhead, a light

flashes upon a girl
treading a tautened wire.
The clowns on the roof of the car
are suddenly juggling fire,

and the lion tamer's head
is deep in the animal's maw,
and the ringmaster is splitting
the princess with a saw,

and the strongman is swallowing down
a gleaming, sharpened sword.
High overhead, the girl
quivers upon her cord

and springs in a backward arc.
Catching the rope with her knees,
she whirls like a torch in the dark
and drops toward a flying trapeze.

February in Baltimore

All afternoon, a steady veil of snow
has drifted past my window. It's the fourth
storm of the season (the fifth snow of my life),
spawned by the Gulf Stream's warming current north,
according to the news. I slip a knife
into a ripe Orlando tangelo,

quartering the fruit. Eight hundred miles south,
a prairie spreads itself beneath the sun.
The blue sky bends to meet the green-gold rim.
Along the sink, the banks are overrun
with alligators, the old phantom limb
of summer dangling from each brutal mouth.

I saw the prairie once, this time of year,
beneath five thousand wintering sandhill cranes.
Now, I lick my fingers clean of tangelo.
The orange-breasted robins whose refrains
have lately breached the silence of the snow
seem not to know that spring is not yet here.

A Horse with No Name

I found it.
It doesn't matter where.
It was far from the desert

but not so far as to preclude
the possibility of it having come
from the desert first.

It was brown. I don't know
what kind of brown. Horse brown.
Not too big, not too small. No,

not expensive-looking. Well-fed, sure.
Maybe a little skinny. No brand.
No saddle; yes, a bridle.

Shoes? I didn't check.
Not sure how old, I didn't check
the teeth either. I don't know

where it is now, it wandered off
toward the dunes. *Where is*
the horse gone? Where

the rider? We are left
with the echo of America, unable
to remember our names.

Crossword

after A. E. Stallings' "Jigsaw Puzzle"

It starts off pretty well. We know
an ÉPÉE is a type of sword,
Starry Night is by VAN GOGH,
the MODEL T made Henry Ford,

and BOOTH shot Lincoln. Dogs BARK;
the COWBOYS won in '93;
quark combined with antiquark
is MESON—and then suddenly

we're stuck. Mired in frustration,
we scour the clues before us,
resisting the temptation
to dig out the thesaurus,

to crumple up the paper
and renounce the stupid game.
We grapple for "a cape or
cloak" (six letters); the name

of some Olympic sprinter
whose victory predates us;
the Spanish word for *winter*;
what year Watergate was;

that Kubrick film we didn't see
(or slept through?); obscure
South Seas geography.
I was so sure

of FUDGE SUNDAE, but now
those letters just won't fit
with HAVE A COW.
You suggest BANANA SPLIT

and fill it in to be perverse.
The puzzle is a mess
of scribbled ink, made worse
by each wrong guess,

in block caps, crossed out
or printed over. We sigh
and bicker, swear and doubt;
you grab the Sports; and I,

disgusted by the Weather,
finally tear the thing to bits. Then
we piece it back together
and stare at it again.

The Naturalist's Wife

*The mountains are calling
and I must go.*

—John Muir

And so he goes, up into that rough land
of snowy crags and tumbled stones, where rivers
pour over gold-veined cliffs, and the wind shivers
through redwood groves. She doesn't understand

but lets him leave. If nothing else, she knows
his heart and his religion need the climb.
Besides, he always circles home in time,
kisses the kids, gives each a wild rose,

takes *her* to bed. At night, she hears him stir
and murmur, in his dreams, the litany
of elsewhere: Glacier Bay, Yosemite,
Hetch Hetchy. She wishes he would look at her

the way he looks at mountains. If she could,
she'd blast each peak and burn down every wood.

Who

Who goes there who do you think
you are who do you think
you are kidding who would have
thought who says who are you to who died
and made you who let the dogs out who
let the cat out of the who in the hell
is your daddy who's who laughs
last who's talking, look.

Foreknowledge

Here in the garden,
we seldom speak

above a whisper.
The streams murmur

without a wind,
the trees leaf themselves

immutably in green,
and the sun hovers,

fixed, at blistering noon.
Our shadows are dark

haloes at our feet,
our tongues weighted

with the names
of many creatures.

Did we choose this?
Did we? Choose?

I rest my palm
against your rib cage.

We are only desire,
dust, and bone.

Move-In

for my brother

After the van was lightened of its load,
the boxes ferried in, the posters tacked
above the bed and desk, the clothes unpacked,
and teenhood's endless miscellany stowed,

you shooed us from the dorm. "Thank you, *goodbye*,"
you grumbled into Mom's departing hug.
Dad rattled off advice; you gave a shrug,
incurably eighteen, and caught my eye.

"Okay, okay," I said, "we're out the door."
We left. And now I think: I guess you're grown.
Does a MacBook make a man? You used to like
to hear me recap parties, football, Psych,
back when this same campus was my own—
but my life can't impress you anymore.

Lightspeed Dating

I'm Prescott Probe—but call me Scott,
and zap me if those eyes are not
the bluest stars I've yet to see
this side of Cartwheel Galaxy.

So what's your field? No, let me guess—
Office of Local Space Largesse?
Wait, really, terraforming? Wow,
a dish like you... but anyhow,

I got my Tyson School degree
in chthonian arcology,
but for the past, mmm, dozen years
I've served the Bureau of Frontiers

and Cross-Disputed Territories.
You wouldn't *believe* the combat stories:
cloaking disasters, drone incursions,
specific gravity inversions...

I wouldn't call myself a hero,
but let's just say absolute zero
separates the men from droids.
Now, hobbies? The Omega Voids

have always been my moonball team;
and, not to boost my own esteem,
but I'm a shark at astro-whist
and a solar-windsurf medalist.

I'm also—oh, but there's the bell.
These dates sure fly by quickly. Well,
what do you say we take a skip?
My saucer's parked just up the strip...

The new Sagitta model's faster,
but mine has got the bigger blaster.
Wouldn't we make a stellar match?
Use your wetware; I'm a catch.

January

We found the mare
in the south pasture, just our side

of a rotted, broken board.
She was not ours. She was not dead

yet, but nearly,
the pulse sluggish at her jaw,

the snow beneath her
black with afterbirth. Between her thighs,

glistening with the first
translucent patternings of frost,

lay the dark foal, stiff
and motionless. Why are terrible things

beautiful to behold?
The sky stretched without answer

toward the distant line
of leafless trees. We peeled away the caul

across the nostrils
and pressed the clear eyes shut.

After an Argument about the Beatles

Wrapped in a blanket, I hunch beside you
at the kitchen table. Milk simmers on the stove;

the apartment fills with clove and cardamom.
We work in silence, your pen scratching

counterpoint to my computer keys, our knees
occasionally touching. I want to apologize again

for last night. I want to climb into your lap
and smell your hair. Instead I watch you sidelong,

your flanneled forearm inching across your paper,
black equations unfurling behind your hand.

Your glasses fog as you sip your tea. You ask me
for the square of seventeen, then answer

your own question: two hundred eighty-one—
no, two hundred eighty-nine.

Long Distance

The cabin lights are dimmed.
We're nearing thirty thousand feet.
Beyond my window, night
weaves highways into tapestries

that blaze and disappear
beneath the airplane's looming wing.
The old man to my right
nurses a scotch; his wife, asleep

against his shoulder, snores.
I've flown this route more times than I
can count, always alone,
always for you. The coming aches

like a broken bone will ache
before a storm. The leaving too.

Seasonal Affective Disorder

They make me anxious,
these dirty heaps of snow,

these dark, shining
booby-traps of ice.

On nice days I am sick
for summertime. On gray days

I can't bear to leave my bed.
Worry circles like a wolf,

yellow-eyed and mean,
and I am easy prey,

with my stomachaches
and cold feet, my inability

to sleep. I dream often
and terribly: hunting,

being hunted, ripping out
my own throat

while scrabbling at the ice,
which is not even

the worst part—the worst part
is the yo-yoing back,

the brain that touches
that glassy sheet of sleep

and yanks itself
irreparably awake.

The Giraffe

“No need to run when you can be a quiet poem masked by a tree.”
—Natalie Angier on giraffes, in *The New York Times*, 10/05/14

Oversized, reticulately
ridiculous, it ambles

over the savannah
on built-in stilts,

a farce of knobbly
knees and ossicones,

of particolored hide,
of blue prehensile

tongue and, finally,
that long-awaited

punchline of a neck.
The giraffe, listening,

doesn't get the joke.
It waggles its pale ears

and stretches up
into a nearby acacia.

The earnest eyes
fixate on a twig.

The tongue curls out.
The branch is drawn

into the mouth,
the wedged head

slowly vanishing
among the leaves,

the body, dark against
the blank horizon,

incapable of disguise.

The Beehive Trail

Mount Desert Island, ME

It was a tricky climb, and one
you tricked me into: handily

omitting the ledge no wider than
my feet; the rungs spread vertically

along the cliff; the dizzying fall
that menaced every step. My grip

was slick and trembling, my will
a panicked knot. Each time the drop

loomed into view, my stomach plunged.
At last you hauled me up to lean

against the sky. Below us ranged
the dark green forest, curled around

a strip of sand—and, just beyond,
the ocean, silvering in the sun.

The Childhood Home

From here it's strange
to think of there.
Even foreordained, the change
feels unexpected and unfair:

the household diminishing room by room
as desks and dressers part from walls
and boxes loom
along the halls,

as Candyland,
those unused binders,
the cat condo and TV stand
are trucked off by their Craigslist finders.

Mom keeps a running play-by-play
each time she telephones to chat.
"What do you say
to *this* or *that*?"

she asks again,
naming more things
left unremembered until then.
Meanwhile, the air conditioning's

replaced, the porch light fixed, the floor
revarnished to please someone new.
The green front door
is painted blue.

Live-Tweet of the Sack of Troy

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 2m

ok I am going to sleep see u guys tomorrow #AeneasOut
#LongLiveTroy

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 17m

i hav had alot of of wine

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 29m

try syaigh that ten tmes fasst

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 31m

whjat if youhad a WOHLERD of woden horpses

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 57m

chk it out Nemean lion nuzzling a sword omg: <http://tinyurl.com/aj43dk5n>

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 2h

everybody is dancing it's kinda cute #revelry

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 3h

ok awesome horse is in

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 3h

@CassandraSeer girl u have NO idea what ur talking about
#women #ShouldBeSeenNotHeard#ThinkTheyKnowEverything

[View conversation](#)

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 3h

dammit now @CassandraSeer is talking crazy shit about hiding
greeks ok she is starting to flip WOW CHILL THE FUCK OUT
GIRL SRSLY

Aeneas retweeted

Priam @AshSpearPriam • 4h

shattered the previous record



[View more photos and videos](#)

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 4h

(fyi, @AshSpearPriam is defending champion of the Annual Anatolian Chariot Challenge)

Aeneas retweeted

Priam @AshSpearPriam • 4h

let's get this baby some wheels #GiddyUp #RidinDirty

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 4h

just one question though how do u move a gigantic wooden horse? @AshSpearPriam

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 4h

ok let's get this horse inside and make us some sacrificial apologies y'all. @GreyEyedAthena plz forgive

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 4h

fuuuuuuuuuuuuuck #what #the #fuck #just #happened
#ThatsWhatUGet #ForStabbingAthenasHorse

Aeneas retweeted

Laocoön @Laocoön • 4h

fdlkajfaoinggggggggnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 4h

THE ARE ATTACKING HIM FUCK GUYS THEY ARE
THROTTLING @Laocoön AND HIS KIDS #??????

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 4h

they are approaching @Laocoön what the

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 4h

actually two snakes !!!!

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 4h

omgomgomg there's a snake

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 5h

consensus seems to be that we are taking it

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 5h

@Thymoetes yes right obv we should take it

[View conversation](#)

Aeneas retweeted

Sinon @SinonSays • 5h

the greeks built it to ensure safe sailing and they built it big to
ensure you couldn't take it

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 5h

#SucksToBeSinon #stillnotsurewhywehaveagianhorse

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 5h

breaking news we found a greek! some dude @SinonSays got
left behind because evidently @CruelOdysseus hates him

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 7h

meanwhile have u guys seen this clip from Achilles v. Hector,
damn: <http://tinyurl.com/nh26ydg>

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 8h

well fuck now what

Aeneas retweeted

Laocoön @Laocoön • 8h

I fear the Greeks even bearing gifts

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 8h

oh man @Laocoön does not like that OH MAN HE JUST
THREW A SPEAR AT THE HORSE #rage #PriestMode

Aeneas retweeted

Thymoetes @Thymoetes • 8h

let's bring it in

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 10h

@AshSpearPriam you got this #King #RememberHector

[View conversation](#)

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 10h

we are going to look at it. notsure what the plan is but

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 11h

also the greeks are gone or something? #pussies
#TroysRuleGreeksDrool

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 12h

@ShipFaceHelen can you please tell @Deiphobus to stop
asking stupid questions

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 12h

@Deiphobus no I do not know what kind of wood

[View conversation](#)

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 12h

@Deiphobus no not a real horse dumbass, it's made of wood

[View conversation](#)

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 12h

but like seriously guys a horse it's like 100 ft. tall.

@GreyEyedAthena would be all over this shit

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 12h

like outside the gate. Nobody seems to know what to do about it.

Aeneas @PiusAeneas • 12h

So apparently there's this horse.

Dad, circa 1998

Your ready grin; the accent I wouldn't hear
for years to come; your snub nose like my own;
your sand-caked skin, the sunscreen-sweat cologne
from Sunday volleyball; the Weizenbier,
and avocado sandwiches, and Wheaties;
the power naps and second shift; the pain
when you would yank my ear; the hurricane;
our Walk for Juvenile Diabetes;
our Smoky Mountain road trip; all the stacks
of *National Geographic* magazine;
your acrobatics on the trampoline;
the *Zöpfe flechten* and the piggybacks;
the separation; the divorce; the hours
of Uno and charades; your fatal flaw
of always running late; Chicken Voila!;
the two weekends a month that would be ours;
the old red Prelude; and your poor-hummed tune
when we waltzed in the parking lot under the moon.

If Hope's the thing with feathers – why –
For all its pretty airs –
Does it so – fucking – seldom fly
In answer – to our prayers?

It perches in the soul – and preens –
And foolishly we tend it –
While blundering through the Hurricanes
And Tempests that offend it –

I've seen it beggared by the frost –
And waterlogged – half-dead –
And given what its song has cost,
I'd say I've been – misled.

Afterlife

When I go,
preserve my parts.

Bottle up
the lungs and liver;

point my soul
in all directions;

tell the sons of Horus
to stand eternal guard.

Rub my skin
with salt and cedar;

swaddle me in cloth.
Weigh my heart

against a feather.
Let the brain

be excavated
and forgot.

The Boats

I count the boats.
This is my task.
I'm ready with my tally

should the harbormaster ask.
I count the boats.
I count all day

as one by one they sally
out across the gleaming bay.
I count the boats.

I watch their white
sails dwindle ever smaller
and then vanish out of sight.

I count the boats.
I mark my ships
as they return, till all are

tethered safely in their slips.

Roughhouse

for my father

I bared my baby teeth: the bottom two,
not loose before, were wiggling quite a bit
beneath my finger, pooled with reddening spit.
I met your eyes—the same familiar blue

as mine—in the bathroom mirror, saw your brow
furrowed with reassurance and concern.
At five, my thoughts were on the cash I'd earn
from trading with the tooth fairy, and how

I'd wow my classmates with the gaping space;
I didn't notice—much less understand—
the bloody towel still fisted in your hand,
nor the flat, shamed expression on your face:

the disbelief, as you made yourself replay
an afternoon of laughing tug-of-war—
you seated on the couch, I on the floor,
the beach towel taut with our unequal weight—
till I, impish and eager to display
my talents as a puppy, snarled and clenched
the prey between my jaws—and you, too late
to stop your own contracting muscle, wrenched.

Shokunin

*I fell in love with my work
and gave my life to it.*

—Jiro Ono

Swift, delicate as doves,
the master's hands
press a scarlet ribbon
of *akami* into rice.
A single brushstroke
glazes the fish. The master
is old, very old, his scalp
smooth and rounded as an egg,
his face rumpled like that
of a baby bird. His restaurant,
crouched and windowless
beside the subway,
holds three Michelin stars.
He has perfected
the art of perfecting,
every day an exhortation
to improve. How good

is good enough? *All I want*

is to make better sushi.

Will he stop? Will

the universe?

At Hickory Downs

The pistol sounds. The horses burst
onto the course, The Point is Moot
already challenging Coeur for first,
Helluva Time in close pursuit,

the desperate jockeys driving hard.
The crowd expects a rousing race:
it's said that Coeur and Scotland Yard
will set a breakneck opening pace—

glittering glasses clink and sweat—
but that Fox will lead the last half mile.
The watchers roar as Idle Threat
edges past Coeur and Winning Smile,

Fox following hot on Idle's tail.
They're on their feet. The field has gained
the quarter pole. Against the rail,
Fox pulls ahead. All eyes are trained

on the home stretch, the charging stallion.
Then a scream. The audience turns.
At the back of the herd, a horse has fallen.
He thrashes, one leg and pastern

distinctly twisted where they splay,
the helpless rider pinned beneath.
Both look to be in a bad way.
All this in less than a moment's breath—

Then, distantly, a growing cheer!
Fox has won it by two noses.
The day is fine, the weather clear,
the winner garlanded in roses.

Ladies and Gentlemen, We Have a Winner

Somewhere, someone is receiving monthly shipments
of a free lifetime supply of Pop Tarts. I prefer not

to give out personal information, I recognize long odds
when I see them, but I enter every sweepstakes

just the same. I want to be chosen by an indifferent hand
reaching to pluck my paper slip. I want everything

to mean something. At what point does a losing streak
become a lost cause? When does bad luck

turn to bad blood? I am trying to crack the algorithm
of how to be. Please, disaster: Not yet. Not me.

Svalbard

I. Spitsbergen

Night stretches across months. Along the shore,
the little colored houses shine their lights
against the silent, cold interior
and out over the floe-encrusted straits

while men in fur-lined anoraks plumb the mines
and teams of sled-dogs plough the moonlit snow.
The polestar winks. The arctic island leans
into the realm of fairytale, a raw

Norwegian dream. And yet this place is real.
Violet and green, the borealis shifts
and ripples in the northern sky, then fades.
Twin foxes slip between the blue arcades
of never-melting ice. A white bear lifts
its red face from the belly of a seal.

II. Unternehmen Haudegen

Bjørnøya, September 4, 1945

Later, they told us we were the last. The Reich,
it seems, had forgotten us—eleven men
on a covert operation to some bleak,
abandoned outpost of the damn campaign...

Our mission: defensive meteorology.
Our station: a frozen heap of rock and wind
as north as one can go. Day after day
of darkness—forty below—and then the blonde

unsettling siren sun... We starved and swore
through months of radio silence, frostbite, *bears*.
We were scientists, not soldiers, and our prayers
were more concerned with dying than defeat.
When the Norwegian sealers came ashore,
I laid my pistol gladly at their feet.

Wedding Photo

Registrar's Office, Antigua, 1989

In the center of the frame
stands my mother,
dark-haired, barely thirty,

her slim wrist
gilded by the watch
that I will someday wear.

Beyond her, the picture
holds only a filing cabinet
piled with paperwork;

a few utilitarian chairs;
a swimsuit calendar
flaunting Caribbean blue

and too much skin;
and, on her right: my father,
blond and tanned,

in a pressed white shirt
and navy jacket—
poised forever

with an embarrassed smile,
surprised to suddenly
find himself there

as she slips a ring
onto his outstretched hand.
Behind the lens,

someone pronounces
man and wife.
Did they really think

Antigua would convert
a ticking clock
and a reluctant heart?

In a future where all this
is but an ill-conceived
vacation, he will tell me

he had thought you only got
one love in life, and she
had not been his.

A Prayer

Today I will ask only
to be allowed to be—
to sever myself cleanly
and with some dignity

from the endless noise and rumpus—
the businesses of life—
and realign my compass
with the tree—the branch—the leaf—

4G LTE

Another slow crawl north
around the Beltway, another frost,

another charred and crumpled fuselage
in the news—every second,

4.3 human beings thrust themselves
bloodily into this world,

and here I sit worrying the radio,
mediating Rachmaninoff

and static. Did you know
that *caribou* means “snow-shoveler”?

It will be all right in the end, if only
we don our vests and wait our turns

for the inflatable slide. I once saw a girl
Snapchat herself choosing Sprite

from a vending machine, four people
in line behind her. Did you know

that between 1978 and 1995,
thirty-seven people were killed

in vending-machine accidents?
I do not pretend to be the author

of this information, I have it all
reliably second-hand.

The Photo Ark

for Joel Sartore

For ten years now he's welcomed them aboard:
Major Mitchell's Cockatoo; a hoard

of green, pink, orange, and yellow katydids;
bobtail, Atlantic brief, and pygmy squids;

two dopey warthogs; a glistening gordian knot
of burrowing python; a one-eyed ocelot;

a Prevost's squirrel; a clouded leopard cub
caught in a yawn. It's an eccentric club

of feathers, claws, and scales, whiskers and quills
immortalized in vibrant macro stills

like trading cards or anxious souvenirs
against the day each species disappears.

In every frame, the photographer can see
his project haunted by mortality:

already the northern white rhinoceros,
her portrait grass-lipped, gentle, serious,

has died—a ruptured cyst—leaving behind
just three unwitting others of her kind.

The fringe-limbed tree frog's shot belies its worth.
He's the only fringe-limbed tree frog left on earth.

The Accident

*And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
the way to dusty death...*

In the dream you are still whole,
cantering in circles, your gelding sure

as song beneath you. Again and again
you flex your reins and gather him,

you surge in the saddle, you hurl yourself
casually into space. Everything is joy

without restraint, ego without discretion.
There is no pain. There is no sick

snap of your head, no ringing
blackness. There is no terrible sky

pinwheeling between legs and hooves
and clattering red-and-white poles,

no *You must lie still. Breathe slowly
and deeply and please do not attempt*

to lift your head. Must caution
necessarily be preceded by mistake?

Your little candle is still waiting
for the match, for the bright heat of fear.

A Portrait of the Artist as an Old Woman

And so the long game ends. My final trick
is played, chips cashed. What's it amounted to?
By my late-quickenning arithmetic,

not much: a half-respected post; a few
forgotten volumes; fewer accolades;
some forays into theory or review—

in short: modest success in modest trades.
Yes, sure, a family, provided for;
the usual hobbies; discontent in spades.

I don't write poems anymore.
I don't see any reason to, when I've
watched my own lackluster meteor

plummet and sputter out. I can revive
only the memory of verve, sincere
and unaware: myself at twenty-five,

audacious, clever—far too cavalier
with the finite fortune of each hour, each year.

Lullaby

out of the cradle endlessly rocking

O fascinated child spinning slowly waiting in your place
eluded still. you little blind star your throat like a river
close one eye open the other open yourself.
note the yellow moon the cracked egg rolled aside
the frayed wing dipping to the cradle of the waves
the salt spray pale as breath in winter vanishing.
sing the old song good song sea song gone.
O low-hanging moon! listening long and long
sink into the white washing breakers rub your face
on the horizon follow the retreating ship sleep.

Wild Horses

They emerge in the blue dusk,
spreading like water across the field,

grays and chestnuts, pintos and roans
blurring together in the dim light.

The wind rustles the tall grass, knots itself
in dark unraveling manes. Quietly,

lungs tight with the leavening air,
pulse slowing with the tump of hooves

against soil, you move among the herd.
They do not flatten their ears

in fear of you. They do not follow you
with their eyes, though your human smell

comes strange through the heather
and the steep-sided shadows.

When you find him, the one
you realize is yours, he is dappled

and proud, promising as an open plain.
There is a hollowing-out

inside of you: a feeling of falling,
of flight. You offer your palm.

Biographical Statement

Carmen Dolling was born in Washington, D.C. in 1990 and grew up in Treasure Island, Florida. She received her bachelor's degree in English and Classical Studies from the University of Florida in 2013. She currently teaches at Johns Hopkins University, where she is a Master of Fine Arts candidate in the Writing Seminars.